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Chronology of U.S. Official Public Statements

**April 14, 2002 -- Statement by White House Press Secretary Ari
Fleischer:**

The United States is monitoring the situation in Venezuela with great concern. We deeply regret the violence and loss of life, and call on all Venezuelans to work peacefully to resolve this crisis.

We welcome and support the decision by the Organization of American States to send immediately a fact-finding mission headed by Secretary General Cesar Gaviria to Venezuela to support the re-establishment of full democracy, with guarantees for citizens and respect for fundamental freedoms, within the framework of the Inter-American Democratic Charter.

The people of Venezuela have sent a clear message to President Chávez that they want both democracy and reform. The Chávez administration has an opportunity to respond to this message by correcting its course and governing in a fully democratic manner.

President Chávez has now called for national reflection and dialogue. He needs to seize this opportunity to ensure legitimacy by reaching out to the political opposition, civil society, and to all democratic forces in Venezuela.

The United States and the world community of democracies will be closely following events in Venezuela. President Chávez bears particular responsibility to preserve the peace, to protect human rights and democratic freedoms, and to create the conditions necessary for a national dialogue. We call on him to work with all Venezuelans and with the Organization of American States toward this end.

**April 14, 2002 -- National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice on
Meet the Press, April 14, 2002:**

I hope that Hugo Chávez takes the message that his people sent him that his own policies are not working for the Venezuelan people, that he's dealt with them in a high-handed fashion. And I hope what he said in his speech this morning, that he understands that this is a time for national reflection, that he recognizes it's time for him

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: JOHN L MILLS
DATE/CASE ID: 30 JUN 2006 200304421

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to reflect on how Venezuela got to where it is. He needs to respect constitutional processes. This is no time for a witch-hunt. This is time for national reconciliation in Venezuela. And we are working with our partners in the OAS and in the region to try and help Venezuela through this very difficult time. But we do hope that Chávez recognizes that the whole world is watching, and that he takes advantage of this opportunity to right his own ship, which has been moving frankly in the wrong direction for quite a long time.

April 12, 2002 -- Statement by State Department Deputy Spokesman Philip Reeker:

In recent days, we expressed our hopes that all parties in Venezuela, but especially the Chávez administration, would act with restraint and show full respect for the peaceful expression of political opinion. We are saddened at the loss of life. We wish to express our solidarity with the Venezuelan people and look forward to working with all democratic forces in Venezuela to ensure the full exercise of democratic rights. The Venezuelan military commendably refused to fire on peaceful demonstrators, and the media valiantly kept the Venezuelan public informed.

Yesterday's events in Venezuela resulted in a transitional government until new elections can be held. Though details are still unclear, undemocratic actions committed or encouraged by the Chávez administration provoked yesterday's crisis in Venezuela. According to the best information available, at this time: Yesterday, hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans gathered peacefully to seek redress of their grievances. The Chávez Government attempted to suppress peaceful demonstrations. Chávez supporters, on orders, fired on unarmed, peaceful protestors, resulting in more than 100 wounded or killed. Venezuelan military and police refused orders to fire on peaceful demonstrators and refused to support the government's role in such human rights violations. The government prevented five independent television stations from reporting on events. The results of these provocations are: Chávez resigned the presidency. Before resigning, he dismissed the Vice President and the Cabinet. A transition civilian government has promised early elections.

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We have every expectation that this situation of democracy will be resolved peacefully and democratically by the Venezuelan people in accord with the principles of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. The essential elements of democracy, which have been weakened in recent months, must be restored fully. We will be consulting with our hemispheric partners, within the framework of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, to assist Venezuela.

February 28, 2002 -- State Department Deputy Spokesman Philip Reeker at the Foreign Press Center on question about policy toward Venezuela under a new ambassador:

I think, you know, we have talked about Venezuela certainly many times from here -- when I have come over here, and Ambassador Boucher has, the secretary has. Some of the concerns we've had about the status of Venezuela's democracy, about the need to pay attention to constitutional processes, how important that is, and to respect democratic institutions in Venezuela, including the independent media, including all those other parts of a civil society, and to do it peacefully, and to recognize the other political elements and to have dialogue on political differences. And so that's what, I think, we'll continue to call upon, and to promote in Venezuela. We have a long, rich history with Venezuela, and we want to see Venezuela to continue to be a member in good standing of the community of democratic nations in this hemisphere. And the OAS has outlined that so well in the democracy charter that was agreed to and signed in Lima.

February 26, 2002 -- State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher during daily briefing:

Question: Another Venezuelan military officer has come out against President Chávez. Are you saying the same thing as last week, or are you escalating?

MR. BOUCHER: I'll say the same thing as last week. I'll say it again and again. We believe that all parties should respect democratic institutions. Those who may want change, political change, need to pursue it democratically and constitutionally. That's part of the democracies charter that we have signed and joined in with others in the hemisphere. And, frankly, that applies to whatever direction the attacks on democracy might be coming from. And we have, I think, made no secret about our concerns

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about some of the things that President Chávez has done, against the opposition, against the free press, which we also consider to be detrimental to democracy. But the important thing is that democracy and the democratic institutions be respected.

February 19, 2002 -- State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher during daily briefing:

Question: My question to you is would the United States support any movement from the military of Venezuela against a democratic and elected president?

Mr. Boucher: I think, as you remember from September 11th in Peru, the OAS has adopted a democracy charter, and we are all pledged to respect democracy in this hemisphere. That includes not only militaries, but also governments. And we have expressed a lot of concerns recently about some of the actions that President Chávez, or at least political supporters of President Chávez, have taken against journalists and democratic institutions.

So our view remains the same, whichever side is threatening democracy, and that is that democratic institutions in Venezuela and elsewhere need to be respected, and that any changes that occur need to be democratic and constitutional.

February 11, 2002 -- State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher during daily briefing:

We have always also said here, repeatedly I think, that we share concerns about radicalization and polarization of the political process in Venezuela, that we supported the democratic process in Venezuela. It remains to be seen what direction that process might take in the coming year, but confrontation and rhetoric we think don't accomplish anything. It is important for all parties involved to engage in a dialogue and to respect the democratic institutions. That is what we've said here.

February 8, 2002 -- State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher during daily briefing:

We have had some concerns about political developments, about the pressure being placed on the opposition about some of the violence that has been directed at opposition

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members, particularly about the situation with regards to the press. So we would hope that things would proceed -- we certainly believe in the democratic institutions of Venezuela, and would hope that they would be respected by all sides.

Question: Do you believe that Mr. Chávez has stepped beyond the pale, as far as being a member of the democratic community of the Americas?

Mr. Boucher: I don't think that's quite a judgment that we can make. The view would be that he needs to respect the democratic institutions, as does everybody.

February 5, 2002 -- Secretary Powell during testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

We have been concerned with some of the actions of Venezuelan President Chávez and his understanding of what a democratic system is all about.

January 24, 2002 -- State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher during daily briefing:

First of all, I think demonstrations, whether they're the opposition or pro-government, represent the kind of freedom of expression, and particularly in the political process, that we have always encouraged. We have been concerned about things in the other direction that tended to limit the political process or limit freedom of expression, such as with the newspapers.

So I think we would have to say that our belief in democracy makes us welcome demonstrations of whatever kind as expressions of -- as a manifestation of freedom of expression. They are a democratic political process, we think, can best foster the kind of peaceful engagement of Venezuelan citizens and the political process that is necessary to resolve these kinds of situations.

January 8, 2002 -- State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher during daily briefing:

We are concerned about the attempts by Chávez supporters to intimidate both opposition politicians and the press. Obviously, demonstrations are part of any normal democratic process, but we don't believe that intimidation is or

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should be. Democratic opposition and the free press are essential to the healthy functioning of the democratic process. We urge all Venezuelans to foster the democratic process through constructive, peaceful engagement and to refrain from statements and actions that create an environment conducive to intimidation.

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December 17, 2001 - Then-Acting A/S Lino Gutierrez Addressing the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

The Catholic Church has an important role to play in Venezuela. In the wake of the December 10 general work stoppage, it will be important for institutions such as the Church to remain engaged. The Church contributes by urging moderation and dialogue, and, as one of the most respected institutions in Venezuela, has considerable influence - the Church's moral voice resonates clearly in Venezuela. The human rights organizations of the Catholic Church have been important monitors of Venezuela's human rights situation. Overall, though human rights difficulties such as deplorable prison conditions and excessive use of force by security forces persist, Venezuela has a generally good human rights record. There are, however, growing concerns about threats against freedom of expression and of the press and undue pressure on organized labor. We appreciate the efforts of these Catholic human rights observers in closely monitoring developments.

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November 25, 2001 -- Then-Acting A/S Lino Gutierrez in Andres Oppenheimer article in the *Miami Herald* entitled "Venezuela's Chávez is facing coup rumors in Latin America:"

"We would categorically reject any attempt to remove Chávez," said Lino Gutierrez, the top State Department official in charge of Latin American affairs. "We consider President Chávez to be the democratically elected leader of Venezuela. Gutierrez told me in a telephone interview from Washington, D.C.: "We stand by the Organization of American States democratic charter, which says very clearly that any government that achieves power via extra-constitutional means will not be welcome in the OAS."

November 15, 2001 -- U.S. Permanent Representative to the Organization of American States (OAS) Roger Noriega responding to questions about Venezuela at the Heritage Foundation during a noontime presentation entitled "The Western Hemisphere: The OAS and U.S. Interests:"

If hypothetical country X has an elected president who dances around the rule of law and is unpredictable, if a general comes and says he is going to put an end to that with a coup d'etat, the OAS is not going to accept that."

June 9, 2001 -- Remarks by the Vice President Richard Cheney at the Hispanic Leadership Forum in Orlando:

Venezuela, of course, like a lot of countries has enormous problems. The huge gap between those few folks at the top who do very well and then the vast majority of people who live in pretty serious poverty. I don't know President Chávez personally. I'm concerned sometimes when I see his policies, what he does. He did get democratically elected by the people of Venezuela, and that counts for something.

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